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ABSTRACT

A study described opinions of Kentucky home economic teachers regarding home visits and made recommendations for improving vocational home economics programs in Kentucky. A random sample of 142 home economics teachers employed in Kentucky during the 1975-76 school year completed a questionnaire concerning the value of home visits, constraints to visiting, teacher education for home visitation, reasons for fewer visits, and suggested improvements. Variables considered included length of employment, residency of students(rural, urban, or suburban), and location of the school in an economically depressed county. Over 90 percent of the respondents felt that home visits were valuable and should be continued. Constraints to home visits listed by respondents included interference due to parent and student employment, involvment in other school activities, increased enrollments, and fear of personal safety. While most respondents considered preservice teacher preparation for home visits inadequate, they were divided regarding inservice teacher preparation. Of the demographic variables considered, length of employment and location of the school in an economically deprived area affected opinions concerning the value of visits and constraints to visitation. Recommendations included emphasizing visits related to student organizations, improving teacher education, and devising innovative means of home contacts. (References and survey results are appended.) (MN)

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TITLE PAGE

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OPINIONS ABOUT HOME VISITS HELD BY TEACHERS OF SECONDARY HOME ECONOMICS

Annotation

This study described opinions of Kentucky secondary home economics teachers regarding home visits and drew implications for statewide program development. Findings revealed that in spite of recognized difficulties, most teachers felt that visits were of value and should be continued. Recommendations included emphasizing visits related to student organizations, improving teacher education and devising innovative means of home contacts.

It is generally accepted among home economics educators that an effective teacher is one who knows and is responsive to the needs and interests of learners and their families. For many years home visits have helped teachers to become aware of individual needs and to gain an insight into the problems, values, aspirations, and practices of the family. These visits have also provided an opportunity for home economics teachers to supervise home experiences of their students. Branegan (1929), noted that the application of knowledge and skills acquired at school to personal and home living by way of home experience has been a part of vocational home economics since its beginning with the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917.

The reason for home experiences and visits in vocational home economics relates to the philosophy of Hammonds and Lamar (1968, p. 118), who said, "vocational education advances only as the people working in it recognize the necessity for experience or practice, relate the practice to the course of study for the classroom, and are able and willing to do the necessary supervision." Whereas students in other vocational programs put their occupational learnings to practice in businesses, institutions, or industries, homemaking students apply learnings in the home or community.

Throughout the history of vocational home economics, teachers' visits to homes of students have been a valuable technique for gaining insight into the social and cultural needs of individuals and families. Exposure to the home environments has in turn helped vocational home economics educators in their efforts to provide programs designed to improve the quality of personal and family life.

In recent years interpretation of home experiences has been expanded. Likewise the concept and the name have been changed to "extended learnings." These changes reflect the expanding roles of homemakers to encompass job and

community responsibilities in addition to those of the home and family. Thus, learnings from home economics classes may be applied to various facets of the student's life which often include, but are not limited to, the home.

In Kentucky, home visits have been promoted through state vocational education guidelines and justified by the contribution the visit can make to the student and the home economics program. It has been noted, however, that various conditions have had an impact on the scope of home economics and home visitation. For example, Gorman, Simpson and Stiles (1961) noted that Kentucky teachers found it difficult to work with students during the summer because students were not at home.

Annual reports over a five-year period preceding this study showed a decrease in the number of home visits made by Kentucky teachers, compared to an increase in home economics enrollments. Changes in social and cultural conditions have affected homes, families, and schools. Revisions in both home economics curricula and vocational education legislation have resulted in new emphases. These modifications have expanded the roles and functions of the home economics teacher leaving less time for visiting.

Concerns related to visiting homes are not unique to Kentucky home economics educators. In North Carolina, a study of problems recognized by home economics teachers (Gatlin and Johnson, 1966) found that over 58 percent of the sample identified the following problems: making home visits, making parental contacts, and working cooperatively with parents in homes.

The literature revealed problems experienced by teachers in other disciplines. Rafael (1970) noted that special education teachers in a home visitation program in New York City were concerned that parents would view visits as an invasion of privacy. Rath (1961), a business educator, recognized the difficulty in making home visits during the day because parents were unavailable.

From the viewpoint of a social studies teacher, Lichtman (1967) recognized problems in visiting such as: large enrollments, school responsibilities in addition to teaching, lack of desire of the teacher to take on this responsibility, possible hostility on the part of parents, and lack of administrative support.

A search of the literature revealed little recent research on home visitation in home economics or other disciplines.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the study was to determine the opinions of home economics teachers regarding home visits and to make recommendations for improving vocational home economics programs in Kentucky. This information was utilized to provide a data base for recommending changes in student home visits and to justify the use of time and the expenditure of vocational funds by teachers in making these visits.

Specific objectives were to describe the opinions of teachers concerning the following aspects of home visits: (1) values of visits, (2) constraints to visiting, (3) teacher education for home visitation, (4) reasons for fewer visits, and (5) suggested improvements. The study also sought to determine any differences among teachers in opinions according to several variables including: (1) length of extended employment, (2) residency of students (rural, urban, suburban), and (3) location of the school in an economically depressed county.

The study was limited to vocational home economics (consumer and homemaking) teachers in Kentucky employed during the 1975-76 school year.

Research Procedures

Sample. A random sample was drawn from a numbered list of Kentucky home economics teachers provided by the Home Economics Unit, Kentucky Bureau of Vocational Education. The list was organized by geographic regions. A table of random digits was used to select 25 percent of the teachers in each region for a sample of 142.

A Likert-type scale opinionnaire was developed by the researcher to obtain information relevant to the objectives of the study. The instrument was reviewed and revised by a jury of teacher educators, supervisors, and teachers. It was then pilot tested with a group of five teachers outside the sample. The instrument was revised again based on results of the pilot test.

Data Collection. The refined instrument was mailed to the sample. After two follow-up letters to non-respondents, 141 responses were obtained making a return rate of 99 percent.

Data Analysis. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (Nie et al., 1975). Median scores on the rating scale and the percentage of responses to the opinion statements were analyzed to determine whether a majority of the teachers agreed, disagreed, or were undecided, and the proportion of the group responding to each level of the scale. The median was selected in that it is considered to be a better measure than the mean for discrete data and is less affected by external values (Glass and Stanley, 1970).

The chi-square (x^2) test of independence was used to determine significant differences ($p = .05$) in opinions according to the demographic variables described above. Open-ended items on the opinionnaire allowed teachers to give reasons for fewer visits and suggestions for improvement.

Opinion statements on the instrument were both positively and negatively stated. In analyzing the data, negative items and their responses were reversed to facilitate the analysis and description.

Results and Discussion

Description of the Sample. As shown in Table 1, page 12, the sample of home economics teachers can be described as predominately rural, with one month of extended employment. They taught a variety of home economics courses. Most were FHA advisors. All teachers in the sample were females.

Responses to the Opinion Statements. According to median scores, it was determined that teachers agreed with 60 percent of the opinion statements, disagreed with 20 percent and were undecided on 20 percent. In presenting the following data, statements are listed in order of the percentage of agreement.

As shown in Table 2, page 13, the majority of teachers agreed with all statements concerning values of visits. These values were similar to ones reported by Sneed (1957) in her study of home visiting as a teaching technique in home economics.

The first four statements were agreed upon by over 90 percent of the respondents. These opinions related to values gained by obtaining information about students, their homes, and families through visiting and by using this information to improve instruction. Although responses to statements 6 and 8 support the value of visits, they imply that other techniques are of some value in learning about homes and families.

Home economics teachers in the study did not feel that home visiting should be their exclusive domain since 75 percent agreed that all teachers could benefit from this activity. Over 61 percent agreed with item 9 concerning the continuing value of home visiting in a vocational home economics program.

One objective was to determine the opinions concerning the constraints experienced by teachers as they visited homes. Data in Table 3, pages 14-15, show that over half of the respondents agreed with eight of these statements. Over 90 percent agreed that parent and student employment interfered with visiting. Increased involvement in other school activities (item 3, Table 3) was felt to curtail visits in 80 percent of the sample. Certain concerns were expressed about visits made before and after the school term. Increased enrollment was cited as a constraint by a majority of teachers but was less of a problem than the increased size of school districts. Fear of personal safety received a slight majority of agreement compared to 37.6 percent disagreement on this constraint.

The division of opinions in several items (numbers 9, 10, 11, 13, and 16) caused the median score to fall in the "undecided" range.

A majority of respondents did not agree that lack of travel funds or length of extended employment constrained their visits nor did visits to students of a different race or culture cause them to feel uncomfortable.

As shown in Table 4, page 16, a majority of the teachers agreed with only one opinion concerning the effectiveness of inservice and preservice teacher education for the competency of visiting homes of students. Regarding preservice teacher education, responses to items 3 and 5 indicate that methods courses and student teaching have not adequately prepared home economics

teachers for making home visits. In a recent study by Frost (1977) it was reported that supervising teachers of home economics in Kentucky also gave a low rating to the adequacy of preparation of teachers for home visiting.

The respondents were divided concerning the adequacy of inservice activities such as teachers' meetings and university workshops or courses. It may be noted that a study by Gorman et al. (1961) recommended more inservice and preservice training of teachers for the supervision of home projects and for other aspects of home visiting.

Differences in Opinions According to the Variables. The study also dealt with the differences in the opinions of teachers according to the variables described. In analyzing the data, the researcher was looking for any differences which might be attributed to characteristics of the sample. In this analysis, the proportions of groups and their responses were compared in order to take into consideration the differences in the sizes of groups with certain characteristics.

Three variables, when cross-tabulated with attitudes statements in the categories of "values" and "constraints", yielded significant differences ($p = .05$). The three variables were length of employment, residence of students and location of the school in an economically depressed county (EDC). An analysis of cross-tabulations revealed that as length of employment increased teachers tended to agree more that all teachers in the school should make home visits ($X^2 = 9.99$, $df = 4$, $p = .04$).

Likewise, proportionately more teachers with two or more months of extended employment agreed that lack of recognition had discouraged teachers from visiting homes ($X^2 = 9.70$, $df = 3$, $p = .05$). More of the teachers with

one month of extended employment agreed that lack of class rolls prior to the opening of school constrained home visitation ($X^2 = 8.14$, df = 3, $p = .04$).

Location of the majority of students' homes in either rural, urban or suburban settings, accounted for the largest number of differences in teacher opinions. Teachers of rural students agreed more than their counterparts in the value of visits for understanding social conditions ($X^2 = 12.97$, df = 6.04, $p = .04$). More rural teachers felt that home visits were still appropriate ($X^2 = 18.07$, df = 8, $p = .02$). Teachers who categorized their student load as predominately suburban agreed more than their counterparts that certain factors constrained their visitation. Cross-tabulations showed more suburban teachers agreeing that meetings and paperwork had crowded out visiting ($X^2 = 19.67$, df = 8, $p = .01$). Also, limited travel funds have curtailed home visits for more suburban teachers ($X^2 = 15.45$, df = 8, $p = .05$).

Location of the school in an economically depressed county accounted for differences in opinions on four opinions related to constraints. More teachers in these counties were undecided about problems caused by teachers and students being of a different race or culture ($X^2 = 13.96$, df = 4, $p = .008$). More teachers in the EDC agreed that teachers would visit after school if given release time during the school day ($X^2 = 9.66$, df = 4, $p = .05$), and more teachers in the EDC felt that lack of travel funds was a constraint ($X^2 = 10.38$, df = 4, $p = .03$).

Finally, fewer number of teachers in the economically depressed counties agreed that the increasing number of working parents has caused problems in scheduling visits ($X^2 = 6.17$, df = 2, $p = .05$).

Responses to Open-ended Statements. Because of the decrease in the average number of visits made by teachers in the preceding five-year period, the study sought to determine the reasons for this situation. Responses to an open-ended statement revealed that student and parent employment, plus the teachers feeling

unwelcome in the homes of students were significant reasons for fewer visits being made. Cave (1970) found that visits may be less successful with older students than with preschool or elementary students since parents are often "less sure of their ground" with secondary-level teachers. Hymes (1974) noted that older students often prefer that parents remain in the background when it comes to their school activities. Another authority (Lichtman, 1967) gave the viewpoint that parents may be dubious of visits since the only other experiences parents may have had with teachers was when their children were involved in some difficulty.

Free responses revealed suggestions that teachers go where parents meet or shop, take students home from school, emphasize visits related to the Future Homemakers of America student organization and stress visits to new students. Increased in-service education and improved reporting procedures were also encouraged as ways of improving home visitation efforts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The implications and recommendations, based on the findings of the study, provide information to home economics teachers, teacher educators, supervisors, and administrators to be used in improving the home visitation aspect of the vocational home economics program. In light of the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the teachers believed home visits continue to be of value, but the implementation should be revised and updated to better accomplish the purposes and alleviate problems. In order to make needed improvements the following recommendations are made:

(1) There is a clear-cut necessity that pre-service teacher educators and supervising teachers develop more effective strategies of learning activities

and student teaching experiences which will improve the quality of teacher preparation for effective home visiting.

(2) An increased effort should be placed on in-service training, including continuing education programs, conferences and graduate courses. These should involve up-to-date approaches to home visiting and other means of working with students and parents outside the classroom.

(3) Innovative approaches to achieving the purposes of home visits need to be promoted, encouraged, and financed. Exemplary projects, designed to deal with some of the constraints experienced by teachers in visiting, should be encouraged.

(4) More emphasis should be placed on FHA-related visits. Advisers of FHA chapters, state supervisors, and teacher educators need to work together to find more effective ways of utilizing the student organization as an opportunity to make more meaningful contacts with homes and families.

(5) Attention should be given to the implications of differences in the opinions of teachers. Based on these differences, planners should consider (a) providing longer terms of extended employment to encourage more home visiting, (b) emphasizing ways to alleviate problems associated with visits as experienced by urban and suburban teachers and (c) providing additional time and funds for the purpose of visiting by teachers in the economically depressed counties.

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Table 1

Demographic Data of Sample

n=141

Variable	n	Percent[a]
Number of Years Teaching Experience		
1-6	57	40.4
7-12	32	22.7
13-18	22	15.6
19 or more	30	21.3
Number of Months Extended Employment		
1 month	115	81.6
2 or more months	14	9.8
Other	12	8.6
Home Economics Courses Taught		
Comprehensive home economics only	23	16.3
Special Interest only	4	2.8
Variety of Classes	103	73.1
Other	11	7.8
Future Homemaker of America Adviserships		
FHA Adviser	104	73.8
Non-adviser	34	24.1
Hours of Graduate Work		
None	35	24.8
1-15	37	26.2
16-30	31	22.1
31-60	35	24.8
61 or more	2	1.4
Location of the Homes of Majority of Students		
Suburban	21	14.9
Urban	26	18.4
Rural	92	65.3
Location of School in an Economically Depressed County (EDC)		
EDC	65	46.0
Non-EDC	76	54.0

[a]Non-response to certain items accounts for totals less than 141 or 100 percent.

Table 2

Values of Home Visits

Values of Home Visits	Percent Total Response n=141[a]		
	Agree (Md≥4)	Disagree (Md≤2)	Undecided (Md=3)
1. Visits enable teachers to make classroom instruction relevant to home environments of pupils.	94.3	3.5	1.5
2. Home visits help teachers further their understanding of social and cultural conditions in the area served by the school.	93.7	3.5	2.1
3. The reasons for certain personality traits and attitudes of a student can be better understood once he/she is seen in relation to the family.	90.1	2.1	7.1
4. Home visits lead to a recognition of some assets of liabilities in the pupil's home which aid or hinder him/her in school.	90.1	5.0	3.5
5. Home visits improve teacher-student-parent relationships.	79.5	9.2	10.6
6. Home visits are one of the most valuable ways of learning about homes and families.	77.3	17.7	4.3
7. All teachers in the school could benefit from visiting homes of students.	75.2	9.9	13.5
8 A look at the student's home often tells more about him/her than any other type of communication.	68.1	25.4	12.1
9. Home visiting continues to be of value in a vocational home economics program.	61.7	14.2	23.4

[a]Percentages which do not equal 100 are due to rounding errors.

Table 3

Constraints to Home Visits

Constraints to Home Visits	Percent Total Response n=141 Agree (Md≥4)	Disagree (Md≤2)	Undecided (Md=3)
1. The increasing number of working parent(s) makes it difficult to visit at a time when parent(s) are home.	96.5	3.5	0.0
2. It is difficult to work with students on extended learnings because many of them have jobs after school and in the summer.	90.9	4.9	3.5
3. Teachers' meetings, paperwork, and other school activities leave little time for home visits.	80.1	14.9	5.0
4. The increasing size of school districts makes it difficult to visit a large percentage of students.	73.8	19.1	5.7
5. Visits before the opening of school are difficult to arrange since class rolls are not available.	69.5	30.5	0.0
6. Visits immediately after the school year are ineffective as the student has not had time to work on extended learnings.	69.5	20.6	9.9
7. Increased enrollment in home economics makes it difficult to visit a large percentage of students.	56.8	31.9	11.3
8. Fear for personal safety keeps teachers from visiting in some areas where students live.	51.8	37.6	10.6
9. Teachers would visit homes after school hours if they were given "free time" during the school day to compensate for this work.	39.7	39.7	20.6
10. Not enough recognition is given to teachers who do a good job of home visiting.	38.3	20.5	41.2
11. Lack of secretarial help during the summer keeps teachers from doing an effective job of visiting.	35.4	45.4	18.5
12. Lack of vocational funds available for travel reimbursement lowers the incentive to visit pupils.	34.0	53.2	12.8
13. Home economics teachers are hesitant about visiting male students.	30.5	34.0	34.8
14. Length of extended employment is not sufficient to visit as many students as teachers would like to visit.	26.9	58.9	14.2

Table 3-continued

Constraints to Home Visits	Percent Total Response n=141 Agree (Md≥4)	Disagree (Md≤2)	Undecided (Md=3)
15. Teachers feel uncomfortable visiting students whose race or culture is different from their own.	24.1	58.9	14.9
16. Lack of a policy regarding the amount of time to be spent in the school-community discourages teachers from visiting.	18.4	49.6	32.0

Table 4

In-Service and Pre-Service Teacher Education
For Home Visiting

In-Service and Pre-Service Education	Percent Total Response n=141		
	Agree (Md≥4)	Disagree (Md≤2)	Undecided (Md=3)
1. Teachers need help in working with families of different cultures.	64.6	19.8	14.9
2. In-service programs have given teachers adequate help in the home visitation aspect.	31.2	44.0	24.1
3. Teachers have been adequately prepared in methods courses for making home visits.	28.3	52.6	19.1
4. University workshops have helped teachers keep up-to-date in newer aspects of home visits.	16.3	35.5	47.5
5. Student teaching has adequately prepared teachers for home visiting.	13.5	68.8	17.7